Nostalgia across cultures

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Abstract

Nostalgia, a sentimental longing for one's past, has been garnering keen empirical attention in the psychological literature over the last two decades. After providing a historical overview, we place the emotion in cross-cultural context. Laypeople in many cultures conceptualize nostalgia similarly: as a past-oriented, social, self-relevant, and bittersweet emotion, but more sweet (positively toned) than bitter (negatively toned). That is, the nostalgizer reflects on a fond and personally important event—often their childhood or valued relationships—relives the event through rose-colored glasses, yearns for that time or relationship, and may even wish to return briefly to the past. Also, triggers of nostalgia (e.g., adverts, food, cold temperatures, loneliness) are similar across cultures. Moreover, across cultures nostalgia serves three key functions: it elevates social connectedness (a sense of belongingness or acceptance), meaning in life (a sense that one's life is significant, purposeful, and coherent), and self-continuity (a sense of connection between one's past and present self). Further, nostalgia acts as a buffer against discomforting psychological states (e.g., loneliness) similarly in varied cultural contexts. For example, (1) loneliness is positively related to, or intensifies, nostalgia; (2) loneliness is related to, or intensifies, adverse outcomes such as unhappiness or perceived lack of social support; and (3) nostalgia suppresses the relation between loneliness and adverse outcomes. Additionally, nostalgia facilitates one's acculturation to a host culture. Specifically, (1) nostalgia (vs. control) elicits a positive acculturation orientation toward a host culture; (2) nostalgia (vs. control) amplifies bicultural identity integration; and (3) positive acculturation orientation mediates the effect of host-culture nostalgia on bicultural identity integration. We conclude by identifying lacunae in the literature and calling for follow-up research.

Keywords

Nostalgia, culture, prototype, acculturation, emotion, social connectedness, meaning in life, self-continuity

Received 1 February 2022; accepted 16 March 2022

Introduction

Nostalgia has a long history, but a brief scientific presence especially in cross-cultural context. In this article, we provide a historical overview of the construct along with contemporary conceptualizations of it. We discuss not only dictionary and scholarly definitions of nostalgia, but also how laypersons think of it across cultures. We subsequently elaborate on the emotion's triggers and functions—both in general and cross-culturally.

Historical overview of nostalgia

The first literary treatment of nostalgia originated in approximately 800 BC. In his epic poem "Odyssey," Homer depicted Odysseus, the canny and cunning king of Ithaca, as nostalgizing recurrently during his 10-year journey from Troy to his homeland (Wilson, 2020).

Nostalgia galvanized our hero to forge ahead despite three years of life-threatening misfortunes. Yearning for home—and thus displaying familial love, as well as loyalty and commitment to his people—was an act of nobility; indeed, Odysseus opted to resume his homebound sea journey in spite of seven years in the loving company of the nymph Calypso and her promise of immortality.

The notion of yearning for one's homeland as honorable and important is also reflected in Psalm 137:5–6 (New American Standard Bible, 2020), where the Israelites, after the fall of Jerusalem, proclaim in their forced exile,

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"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you." Yet, this notion did not make headway in the scholarly literature until the late 17th century. This is when a medical student at the University of Basel, Johannes Hofer (1688/1934), published his dissertation on nostalgia.

The term was coined by Hofer (1688/1934). It consists of two Greek words: *nostos*, return to one's native land, and *algos*, pain or suffering. So, nostalgia is the pain that one experiences by their desire to return home. Based on a few interviews with Swiss mercenaries in the French army, Hofer concluded that nostalgia is a neurological or medical disease, manifesting such symptoms as emotional lability —from despondency to weeping—anorexia, and suicidal ideation. Clearly, yearning for home acquired a new meaning: from a patrician sentiment to a serious medical infirmity. This new meaning persisted for over 100 years. In the 19th century, nostalgia was regarded as a psychiatric disorder symptomatic of sadness, anxiety, weakness, appetite loss, insomnia, and fever. In the 20th century, psychodynamic theorizing also considered nostalgia a clinical malady, labeling it varyingly as an obsessive mental state, a repressive compulsive disorder, or an immigrant psychosis, and proposing as its root cause "an acute yearning for a union with the preoedipal mother" (Kaplan, 1987, p. 466). In the late 20th century, nostalgia was still thought of as an undesirable affliction, confined to a few (rather marginalized) populations, such as first-year boarding or university students, seafarers, immigrants, and soldiers (for reviews, see: Dodman, 2018; Sedikides et al., 2004).

One reason why the negative reputation of nostalgia persisted was its medicalization by Hofer (1688/1934) and

subsequent generations of physicians and psychiatrists (Batcho, 2013; Nikelly, 2004). Another reason was its conceptual confusion with homesickness (Sedikides et al., 2004). By the beginning of the 21st century, the two literatures had gone their separate ways. Homesickness referred to psychological maladjustment (e.g., separation anxiety) accompanying a young person's transition away from the home environment (Kerns et al., 2008; Thurber & Walton, 2007). Nostalgia, on the other hand, was rehabilitated as a prevalent, mostly positive, and functional emotion that can refer to any significant aspect of one's past (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, Zhou, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020). After a 2,800-year journey, nostalgia had returned home—to its original, Homeric meaning.

Conceptualizations of nostalgia

Dictionary and scholarly definitions

Dictionaries define nostalgia in terms of sentimental yearning and affective ambivalence, if not positivity. For example, according to the *Random House Dictionary* (2001), nostalgia is "a sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place or time"; according to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1994), it is "a bittersweet longing for the past"; and according to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998, p. 1266), it is "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past."

Various authors conceptualized the emotion in similar terms. For instance, Werman (1977, p. 393) characterized it as "bittersweet, indicating a wistful pleasure, a joy tinged with sadness." Davis (1979, p. 18) labeled nostalgia "a positively toned evocation of a lived past," further stating (p. 14) that "the nostalgic … experience … is infused with imputations of past beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, love … Nostalgic feeling is almost never infused with those sentiments we commonly think of as negative, for example, unhappiness, frustration, despair, hate, shame, abuse," and concluding (p. 14) that "the component of sadness serves only to heighten the quality of recaptured joy." Lastly, Kaplan (1987, p. 465) construed nostalgia as a "warm feeling about the past, a past that is imbued with happy memories, pleasures, and joy," maintaining that the experience is "basically one of joyousness, producing an air of infatuation and a feeling of elation."

Lay conceptions

Do laypersons' views of nostalgia dovetail with the dictionary and scholarly definitions? To address this question, researchers explored the nostalgia prototype both in Western cultures (i.e., UK and USA; Hepper et al., 2012) and in cultures around the world (Hepper et al., 2014).

Table 1. The nostalgia prototype.

Central features of the prototype	Peripheral feature of the prototype
Memory/memories	Comfort/warmth
The past	Wishing/desire
Fond memories	Dreams/daydreaming
Remembering	Mixed feelings
Reminiscence	Change
Feeling	Calm/relaxed
Personal meaning	Regret
Longing/yearning	Homesickness
Social relationships	Prestige/success
Memorabilia/keepsakes	Aging/old people
Rose-tinted memory	Loneliness
Happiness	Sadness/depressed
Childhood/youth	Negative past
Sensory triggers	Distortions/illusions
Thinking	Solitude
Reliving/dwelling	Pain/anxiety
Missing	Lethargy/laziness
Want to return to past	

Understanding of the construct "nostalgia" is shaped by repeated experience and becomes cognitively organized around an abstract, fuzzy category known as prototype (Wittgenstein, 1953/1967). The nostalgia prototype consists of features that are central (more representative) or peripheral (less representative) of it (Gregg et al., 2008; Rosch, 1978).

The nostalgia prototype in Western cultures. Hepper et al. (2012, studies 1–6) established the nostalgia prototype in the UK and the USA. First, participants generated 1,752 descriptors presumed to characterize nostalgia (an average of 7.5 descriptors per participant). Independent coders classified these descriptors into 35 features. In another study, participants rated each feature in terms of its relatedness (centrality) or unrelatedness (peripherality) to the prototype of nostalgia. A median split yielded 18 central and 17 peripheral features (Table 1). Central features indicated that nostalgia is an emotion, refers to one's past, and entails fond and somewhat idealized memories of it. Further, those memories stem from one's childhood or youth, close relationships, and memorabilia or keepsakes, and so the memories are personally meaningful or self-defining. Lastly, the emotion involves reliving one's past and experiencing both positive affect (e.g., happiness) and negative affect (e.g., sadness). Peripheral features of nostalgia, on the other hand, included warmth/comfort (the highest-ranking feature), daydreaming, change, relaxation, and experiencing regret, success, or lethargy.

Next, Hepper et al. (2012) attempted to validate the centrality or peripherality of the 35 features. Participants viewed all features successively on a computer screen. Each feature was embedded in a sentence, designed to activate the construct "nostalgia" (e.g., "Nostalgia is about childhood"). After a brief distractor task, participants recalled all features. Subsequently, they completed a recognition task: They were presented with all features and indicated which one they had seen before. Hepper et al. calculated the proportions of central and peripheral features that participants recalled and recognized. Participants recalled, and falsely recognized, more central than peripheral features. This finding is consistent with prototype theory, according to which central features are encoded more deeply, and are more cognitively accessible, than peripheral ones (Cantor & Mischel, 1977; Rosch, 1978).

The validation process continued (Hepper et al., 2012). In a follow-up study, participants (a) perceived central, peripheral, and control (i.e., nostalgia-irrelevant) features, and (b) responded with a "Yes" or a "No," and as fast as they could, to the probe "Is this a feature of nostalgia?" Participants were faster and more accurate in classifying central (relative to peripheral or control) features as being part of the construct nostalgia. In another study, participants viewed vignettes about various characters' lives. Participants regarded the vignettes as more nostalgic, when these were described with central (rather than peripheral) features. In a final study, participants completed a manipulation of nostalgia, the Event Reflection Task (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, Zhou, 2015; Appendix A). Specifically, they brought to mind and wrote about either a nostalgic event (nostalgia condition) or an ordinary event (control condition) from their lives. Afterward, they rated the event on the 35 prototypical features, and indicated their current level of the emotion (i.e., "I feel nostalgic when I think about this event"). Participants deemed that the nostalgic (relative to the ordinary) events comprised more central than peripheral features. Further, participants in the nostalgia (vs. control) condition felt more nostalgic at the moment, because the nostalgic event included—according to them—more central (rather than peripheral) features.

The nostalgia prototype cross-culturally. Hepper et al. (2014) asked whether the abovementioned findings are applicable cross-culturally. Do the prototypical UK/US conceptions of nostalgia generalize to various cultures across five continents (Shi et al., 2021)? They re-sampled the UK and USA, but also sampled another 16 cultures: Australia, Cameron, Chile, China, Ethiopia, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Turkey, and Uganda. Hepper et al. maintained sample consistency in age and educational achievement by testing only university students (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Further, they used —as before—an etic approach (Segall et al., 1998), that is, they compared multiple cultures at once.

Hepper et al. (2014) gave participants the list of 35 features (identified by Hepper et al., 2012) and asked them to rate the degree to which each feature was related to their conception of nostalgia, that is, how central (vs. peripheral) each feature was. Hepper et al. (2014) first examined the cross-cultural similarity of conceptions of nostalgia: Is there consensus among cultures on the issue of which features are more central than others? Cross-cultural agreement was high on the prototypicality of nostalgia features. This finding suggests that conceptions of nostalgia are pan-cultural. Moreover, Hepper et al. (2014) examined the correlations among the 35 nostalgia features. Specifically, they calculated all non-redundant correlations among the 35 features, separately for each country. Then, they cluster-analyzed the countries with regard to the similarity of the corresponding correlation matrices. The degree of cross-cultural consistency in the interrelations among nostalgia features was high. That is, all but three African countries (i.e., Cameroon, Ethiopia, Uganda) formed a single cluster, with ancillary analyses revealing more similarities than differences between these three countries and the rest. These results pointed to high levels of cross-cultural agreement in the factor structure of the nostalgia prototype.

Next, the researchers pooled the correlation matrices across countries (except Cameroon, Ethiopia, and

Uganda) and then factor-analyzed the combined matrix, revealing three factors. Factor 1 contained 12 central nostalgia features focusing on cognitive content (e.g., memory) and motivation (e.g., longing); it was labeled *longing for the past*. Factor 2 included eight peripheral features focusing on *negative affect*. Factor 3 captured eight central and peripheral features focusing on feelings and sources of *positive affect*. Across cultures, participants rated *longing for the past* most central, followed by *positive affect*, with *negative affect* rated least central.

The findings indicate that individuals across an array of cultures share similar notions of nostalgia. They regard it as an emotion, involving remembering longingly fond occasions from one's past. The pertinent memories are personally relevant, as they refer to one's interactions with close others. Moreover, nostalgia is bittersweet, albeit more sweet (i.e., positive affect is largely localized in its central features) than bitter (i.e., negative affect is largely localized in its peripheral features).

Summary and additional notes on the nature of nostalgia

The two prototype investigations (Hepper et al., 2012, 2014) illustrated that lay conceptions of nostalgia are similar across many countries. Nostalgia emerged as past-oriented, self-relevant, keenly social, and ambivalent, albeit predominantly positive (see also Van Tilburg, Wildschut, & Sedikides 2018; Van Tilburg, Bruder, et al., 2019). Thus, when nostalgizing, one brings to mind a fond and meaningful event, typically involving their childhood or valued relationships. The individual often relives the event through rose-colored glasses, longs for that time or relationship, and may even wish for a brief return to the past.

We would like to elaborate on the ambivalent character of nostalgia. Content analyses of nostalgic narratives among UK participants have shown a similar blend of primarily positive (e.g., content, joy, tenderness, serenity) and secondarily negative (e.g., sadness, loss) affect (Madoglou et al., 2017; Wildschut et al., 2006). Also in a British sample, the affectively imbued nostalgia narratives typically follow a redemptive trajectory, in which the negatively toned part is overcome by the positively toned part (i.e., the narrative starts badly but ends well; Wildschut et al., 2006). Further, in an experience sampling study conducted in the USA, 72% of nostalgic participants showed increases in positive affect but only 51% showed increases in negative affect, with older participants manifesting larger affective discrepancy compared to younger ones (Turner & Stanley, 2021). Lastly, a large number of experiments, mostly involving American and British participants, demonstrated that nostalgizing (vs. control) increases positive, but not negative, affect (Sedikides, Wildschut,

Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, Zhou, 2015; Sedikides et al., 2021). These result patterns have been replicated in an Integrative Data Analysis involving 41 published experiments, six of which involved Chinese participants (Leunissen et al., 2021), although a meta-analysis of 15 "Event Reflection Task" experiments revealed that nostalgic (vs. control) reverie increased both positive and negative affect, with the latter effect being small ($d = 0.11$; Frankenbach et al., 2021).

The reviewed literature reinforces the notion that nostalgia is a normal emotion (not a pathology) and underscores the emotion's prevalence in everyday life. For example, 79% of UK undergraduate students, and more than 50% of UK adults between 18 and 90, reported on the Southampton Nostalgia Scale (Appendix B) that they experienced nostalgia at least once a week (Hepper et al., 2021; Wildschut et al., 2006). Similarly, in another investigation involving 28 cultures and a special administrative region of China (i.e., Hong Kong), 68% of participants reported—also on the Southampton Nostalgia Scale—that they experienced nostalgia at least once a week, with the median being twice a week (Hepper et al., 2022).

Triggers of nostalgia

We review below both general and culture-specific triggers of the emotion.

Triggers in Western cultures

Research with Western samples has established that nostalgia can be triggered by phenomena from one's past. These phenomena include objects or events experienced in childhood (Holbrook & Schindler, 1996; Schuman & Scott, 1989), momentous events from one's life (e.g., graduation, wedding, birth of a child; Wildschut et al., 2006), close others (e.g., friends, relatives, partners; Newman et al., 2020; Wildschut et al., 2006), smells (Reid et al., 2014), tastes, or foods (Supski, 2013; Zhou et al., 2019), song lyrics, songs, or music (Cheung et al., 2013; Routledge et al., 2011), and visual stimuli such as adverts, reading materials, or social media (Lasaleta et al., 2014; Marchegiani & Phau, 2013; Wildschut et al., 2018). In addition, nostalgia can be triggered by discomforting states like negative affect (Barrett et al., 2010; Wildschut et al., 2006), loneliness (Wildschut et al., 2006, 2010), procedural injustice in the workplace (Van Dijke et al., 2015), meaninglessness (Routledge et al., 2011, 2012), disillusionment (Maher et al., 2021), death cognitions (Routledge et al., 2008), self-discontinuity (i.e., a sense of disconnect between one's past and one's present self; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015), boredom (Van Tilburg et al., 2013), and social exclusion (Seehusen et al., 2013; Wildschut et al., 2010). Lastly, the emotion can be triggered by adverse

weather, such as rain, wind, or thunder (Van Tilburg, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2018).

Triggers in cultural context

Some of the above findings have been replicated in Eastern cultures. For example, nostalgia is triggered by loneliness (Zhou et al., 2008, 2021), food (Zhou et al., 2019), and cold temperatures (Zhou et al., 2012) in China, as well as by adverts in China (Zhou et al., 2012) and Japan (Kusumi et al., 2010).

In their multi-culture investigation (i.e., 28 countries and one region—Hong Kong), Hepper et al. (2022) addressed culture-specific triggers of nostalgia. They presented participants with 17 triggers (e.g., situations, cues, events, psychological states), based on pertinent literature, and asked them to rate the potency of each trigger to elicit nostalgia (e.g., "How often do you feel nostalgic when in that situation?"). An Exploratory Factor Analysis distilled three factors: sensory triggers (i.e., photos/keepsakes, music, seeing friends, scent), psychological threats (i.e., sad, lonely, bored, meaningless, cold, life changes, fear of future, fear of death, discontinuity), and social gatherings (i.e., community events, religious rituals, festivals, family gatherings).

Sensory stimuli emerged as the most frequent trigger of nostalgia, followed by psychological threats, and then social gatherings. The dimension of individualism/collectivism (Hofstede et al., 1990/2010) did not account for this variance. Culture, however, did account for variance ranging from 8 to 16% of it. In particular, an exploratory cluster analysis yielded four clusters. Eleven countries or regions (e.g., Australia, Chile, China, Hong Kong, UK) in the first cluster endorsed strongly sensory and psychological threat triggers, but endorsed social triggers less than other clusters did. Ten countries in the second cluster (e.g., Cameroon, Finland, Italy, Japan, Poland) endorsed sensory triggers somewhat less than those in the first cluster, and endorsed threat triggers as low as those in the first cluster. Five countries in the third cluster (i.e., Brazil, Greece, India, Tunisia, USA) endorsed social triggers more than those in the first and second cluster, and fell between the other clusters on sensory and psychological threat triggers. Lastly, three countries in the fourth cluster (i.e., Ethiopia, Romania, Uzbekistan) endorsed social triggers more, and sensory triggers less, than other countries. We observe that, although individualism/collectivism did not emerge as a significant predictor in multilevel analyses, the two clusters (third and fourth) that endorsed social triggers consisted mostly of collectivistic countries.

Average temperature and indices of development (i.e., GDP, life satisfaction, life expectancy) also accounted for a portion of the variance. In terms of temperature, participants in warmer (vs. colder) countries were more likely to endorse psychological threats as triggers of nostalgia.

People in warmer countries might experience more such threats, a possibility generally congruent with reports of higher aggression in warmer climates (Allen et al., 2018). In terms of development, participants in more (than less) developed countries were more likely to endorse sensory triggers and less likely to endorse social triggers. People in more developed countries might derive information and entertainment mostly from media (e.g., internet streaming, smartphones), and thus be inundated with sensory stimuli, whereas people in less developed countries might have reduced access to such media and instead rely more often on conversations and social gatherings for information and entertainment. Regardless, we emphasize that the findings revealed much more variation within countries than between countries. Stated otherwise, nostalgia seems to be triggered in similar ways around the world.

Functions of nostalgia

So far, we addressed what nostalgia is (i.e., definitions, prototype approach) and how it is triggered. We now turn to what nostalgia does. In particular, we discuss three key functions of the emotion: social connectedness, meaning in life, and self-continuity. Before doing so, however, we consider the pillar of these functions, the approach-oriented property of nostalgia.

Nostalgia as an approach-oriented emotion

Nostalgia may be past-oriented, but its utility extends to the present and future. Early theorists foresaw this idea. For example, Davis (1979, p. 420) stated,

It [nostalgia] reassures us of past happiness and accomplishment; and, since these still remain on deposit, as it were, in the bank of our memory, it simultaneously bestows upon us a certain worth, irrespective of how present circumstances may seem to question or obscure this. And current worth, as our friendly bank loan officer assures us, is titled to at least some claim on the future as well.

Similarly, Kaplan (1984, p. 151) opined that nostalgia "takes the sting out of the sense of loss … Time is irreversible, but the goodness that was serves as incentive for aspiration."

Approach motivation is "the impulse to go toward" (Harmon-Jones et al., 2013, p. 291) or "the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior toward, positive stimuli (objects, events, possibilities)" (Elliot, 2006, p. 111). Approach motivation exerts a strong influence on human thinking and behavior (Elliot, 2008).

Nostalgia proneness is positively related to approach motivation. Stephan et al. (2014) found a positive relation between dispositional nostalgia, assessed with the

Southampton Nostalgia Scale (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, Zhou, 2015), and approach motivation, assessed with the Behavioral Activation Scale (Carver & White, 1994). Importantly, these authors documented a causal relation between nostalgia and approach motivation. Specifically, they induced nostalgia with the Event Reflection Task and measured approach motivation with a state version of the Behavioral Activation Scale (e.g., "I am always willing to try something new if I think it will be fun," "I go out of my way to get things I want"). Nostalgia (vs. control) strengthened approach motivation.

By being approach-oriented, nostalgia must invigorate the individual toward achieving social connectedness, meaning in life, and self-continuity. We review evidence for this hypothesis.

Functions in Western cultures

Social connectedness. Nostalgia is a social emotion. Persons and close relationships are at the heart of nostalgic recollections (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019). When nostalgizing, the mind is "peopled" (Hertz, 1990, p. 195), with close but bygone figures being brought to life and symbolically becoming part of one's present.

Prototype-based research, mentioned above (Hepper et al., 2012, 2014), showed that laypersons conceptualize nostalgia in terms of sociality. For example, laypersons ascribe to the construct such central features as memories of their childhood or youth in the context of social relationships, yearning for close others, and a sense of warmth. Likewise, content analyses of nostalgic narratives or song lyrics highlight social objects (e.g., relationships, social interactions), momentous or leisure events involving others (e.g., graduations, birthday, holidays, vacations), tangibles (e.g., toys, books) given by significant others or shared with them, and social sentiments such as being loved or comforted by others (Abeyta, Routledge, Roylance, et al., 2015; Batcho et al., 2008; Sedikides et al., 2018; Wildschut et al., 2006).

Due to its inherent sociality, nostalgia is likely to increase social connectedness. We define this construct in terms of belongingness or acceptance (Wildschut et al., 2006). A sizeable literature documented that experimentally induced nostalgia (via the Event Reflection Task, songs, or music) augments social connectedness (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, Zhou, 2015; Frankenbach et al., 2021). For example, nostalgic (vs. control) participants report lower attachment avoidance and lower attachment anxiety (Wildschut et al., 2010). They also feel more connected to loved ones, protected, and loved (Nostalgia Functions Scale; Hepper et al., 2012; see also Wildschut et al., 2006). Further, they show more empathy and trust for others, including members of an outgroup (Hepper et al., 2012; Wildschut et al., 2006;

Turner et al., 2012). In addition, they manifest stronger interpersonal competence and social goals (Abeyta, Routledge, & Juhl, 2015; Wildschut et al., 2006). Finally, they become more eager to interact with a stranger (Stephan et al., 2014; Wildschut et al., 2006) or an outgroup member (Turner et al., 2018), as well as more likely to help another person (Stephan et al., 2014), contribute to charity (Ford & Merchant, 2010), or solicit help from others when in need (Juhl et al., 2021). The effects of nostalgia on social connectedness last at least six weeks, as a six-week intervention involving a weekly nostalgia induction (with the Event Reflection Task; Layous et al., 2021) demonstrated. Taken together, nostalgia fosters social connectedness.

Meaning in life. Meaning in life refers to the subjective perception that one's existence is significant (i.e., has worth), purposeful (i.e., has direction), and coherent (i.e., has predictability; King et al., 2016). Nostalgic narratives invoke momentous events from one's life (e.g., anniversaries, graduations; Wildschut et al., 2006) or cultural life scripts (e.g., festival celebrations, Sunday lunches; Berntsen & Rubin, 2004). These occurrences are full of meaning: they are significant (i.e., valued), purposeful (i.e., goal-directed), and coherent (i.e., predictable). So, they serve as a platform for reinforcing the presence of meaning in one's life (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018).

Experimental evidence is consistent with this idea. Hepper et al. (2012) relied on the prototype approach to manipulate nostalgia. Participants reflected on events described either with central nostalgia features (e.g., "rose-tinted memories," "familiar smells," "keepsakes"; *nostalgia condition*) or peripheral nostalgia features (e.g., "wishing," "daydreaming," "achievements"; *control condition*). Subsequently, participants responded to four items, such as "life is worth living" and "life has a purpose" (Nostalgia Functions Scale). Nostalgic participants expressed higher meaning than controls. Further, Sedikides et al. (2018) manipulated nostalgia with the Event Reflection Task. Nostalgic (relative to control) participants exhibited higher meaning, assessed with the same four items as above. Similar findings were reported by Baldwin and Landau (2014), Evans et al. (2021), and Van Tilburg et al. (2013) and Van Tilburg, Sedikides, et al. (2019). These findings were also replicated with a variant of the Event Reflection Task, in which the control condition involved a desired (rather than ordinary) event from participants' lives (Routledge et al., 2012). Again, nostalgic (relative to control) participants reported higher meaning in their lives, as assessed with the the Presence of Meaning in Life subscale of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006).

Another experiment used song lyrics to manipulate nostalgia. In the first session, Routledge et al. (2011) instructed participants to generate titles and vocalists of three songs that made them feel nostalgic. Afterward, the researchers

assigned participants to the nostalgia and control conditions, and proceeded to retrieve the lyrics of one of those three songs (randomly determined). In the second session, about a week later, Routledge et al. yoked each participant in the control condition to one in the nostalgia condition (after ensuring the non-commonality of the songs listed in the first session as nostalgic). Put otherwise, participants in the two conditions read lyrics to the same song, but for half the song was nostalgic and for the other half non-nostalgic. Lastly, all participants filled out the Presence of Meaning in Life subscale (Steger et al., 2006). Participants in the nostalgia condition rated their lives as more meaningful than controls.

A quasi-experiment relied on scents to manipulate nostalgia (Reid et al., 2015). In a pilot study, participants sampled 33 scented oils and stated how nostalgic each scent made them feel. The researchers saved the 12 scents with the highest item–total correlations (e.g., Chanel #5, apple pie, fresh-cut roses) for use in the subsequent experiment. In that experiment, participants sampled each of the 12 scents (also in random order), rated them for nostalgia (i.e., "How nostalgic does this scent make you feel?"), and answered two meaning items (i.e., "life is meaningful," "life has a purpose"). Greater scent-evoked nostalgia predicted higher meaning in life. Finally, the influence of nostalgia (induced with the Event Reflection Task) on meaning in life lasts at least six weeks, as a six-week intervention illustrated (Layous et al., 2021). In all, nostalgia serves as a wellspring of life meaningfulness.

Self-continuity. We define self-continuity as a sense of connection between one's past and present self (Sedikides et al., 2008). Theorists have linked nostalgia with self-continuity. For example, Davis (1979, p. 34) wrote that nostalgia "marshal[s] our psychological resources for continuity." As we mentioned above, when nostalgizing one brings to mind momentous life events (Wildschut et al., 2006) or cultural rituals (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004) from their personal past. Such occasions bridge the gap between one's past and present, creating a storyline that clarifies the person's temporal path (e.g., relating last year's to the current year's family reunion). Indeed, preliminary findings, based on analyses of nostalgic narratives, also suggest such a link. For example, such narratives often include statements that tether participants' past (e.g., seeing a family photograph) to their present (e.g., I smile; Stephan et al., 2012). In all, nostalgia serves as a scaffold for reaching self-continuity.

Evidence aligns with this idea. An experiment induced nostalgia with the prototype approach. In the nostalgia condition, participants reflected on events characterized by central nostalgia features, whereas, in the control condition, participants reflected on events characterized by peripheral nostalgia features. Subsequently, participants completed the 4-item Self-Continuity Index (e.g., "I feel connected with

my past," "Important aspects of my personality remain the same across time"; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015). Nostalgic participants reported higher self-continuity than controls (Abakoumkin et al., 2019). These results were replicated when nostalgia was induced with the Event Reflection Task (Abakoumkin et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2021; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015; Sedikides et al., 2016; Wildschut et al., 2018; Van Tilburg, Sedikides, et al., 2019). Also, in the quasi-experiment described previously (Reid et al., 2015), scent-evoked nostalgia predicted greater self-continuity, assessed with two items from the Self-Continuity Index. Moreover, in a 6-week intervention inducing nostalgia weekly (with the Event Reflection Task), the influence of nostalgia on self-continuity lasted at least six weeks (Layous et al., 2021). In all, nostalgia elevates self-continuity.

Functions in cultural context

The literature has also examined the three key functions of nostalgia cross-culturally. We describe relevant findings below.

Social connectedness. Four experiments, involving Chinese samples, have been concerned with the causal impact of nostalgia on social connectedness. In particular, nostalgic (vs. control) participants were more likely to make charitable donations (Zhou et al., 2012), placed their own chair closer to the one for a person they were about to meet (Stephan et al., 2014, Study 4), were more willing to come to the aid of an ostensibly clumsy experimenter (Stephan et al., 2014, Study 5), and were more eager to solicit help from a stranger when in time of need (Juhl et al., 2021). Another experiment testing Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia also demonstrated that nostalgia (induced via the Event Reflection Task) increases social connectedness, assessed with the Nostalgia Functions Scale (Wildschut et al., 2019).

The causal impact of nostalgia on social connectedness has also been tested in a multi-culture investigation (i.e., 28 countries and Hong Kong; Hepper et al., 2022). Nostalgia was manipulated with the Event Reflection Task, and social connectedness was measured with the Nostalgia Functions Scale. Nostalgia increased social connectedness across all cultures.

Meaning in life. Experimentally induced nostalgia elevated meaning in life among Syrian refugees (Wildschut et al., 2019). Furthermore, in their multi-culture investigation, Hepper et al. (2022) addressed the causal influence of nostalgia, induced with the Event Reflection Task, on meaning in life, assessed with the Nostalgia Functions Scale. Nostalgia elevated meaning across all cultures. Further, the effect was stronger in wealthier countries. A reason

was that participants in poorer countries also gained meaning by reflecting on the ordinary event (i.e., control condition). As such, future research would need to further neutralize the control condition—for example, through self-distancing (Kross & Ayduk, 2017). In particular, participants could be instructed to think of a past event in their lives from the perspective of a historian.

Self-continuity. An experiment conducted in China illustrated that nostalgia, induced via the Event Reflection Task, raised self-continuity (Sedikides et al., 2016). This effect was replicated among Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia (Wildschut et al., 2019). Hepper et al. (2012) established the same causal flow in their multi-culture investigation, manipulating nostalgia with the Event Reflection Task, and assessing self-continuity with the Self-Continuity Index. The authors observed this effect in all cultures, although, as per meaning in life, it was stronger among wealthier than poorer countries.

Nostalgia as a buffer

Returning to the Homeric epic, Odysseus found nostalgizing therapeutic. Nostalgia served as a "pick me up," helping him recover from the hassles inflicted upon him by assorted evildoers. Nostalgia, then, can act as a balm to one's psychological wounds. We consider the buffering role of nostalgia both in the West and cross-culturally.

The buffer property of nostalgia in the West

Extensive research in Western cultures has shown that nostalgia buffers against various forms of adversity (Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022a, 2022b). For example, nostalgia shields the individual from the often pernicious psychological knocks of loneliness (Wildschut et al., 2006) or social exclusion (Seehusen et al., 2013), meaninglessness (Routledge et al., 2011) or disillusionment (Maher et al., 2021), and self-discontinuity (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015).

We will illustrate the buffer property of nostalgia in the case of loneliness. Gardner et al. (2005) distinguished between direct and indirect compensatory strategies. A person uses direct strategies when interaction partners are readily available to form or maintain relationships. However, a person uses indirect strategies when such partners are unavailable. Here, the person derives social connectedness from mental representations of relationships. Nostalgia is an indirect compensatory strategy. In situations of relational unavailability, people nostalgize to offset loneliness and sustain social connectedness.

A relevant theoretical model, the Regulatory Model (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, Zhou, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022a, 2022b), posits the following. First, loneliness is associated with higher

nostalgia or increases nostalgia. Second, loneliness is associated with, or increases, an adverse outcome such as perceived lack of social support or unhappiness. Third, nostalgia suppresses (i.e., countervails; Paulhus et al., 2004) the association between loneliness and the adverse outcome.

The first tenet, that loneliness increases nostalgia, was illustrated by Wildschut et al. (2006). All participants completed the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al., 1980). In the experimental condition, the response options were rigged (as per Salancik & Conway, 1975) to elicit agreement (e.g., "I *sometimes* feel isolated from others") and so create the sense of high loneliness. In the control condition, the response options were also rigged, but to elicit disagreement (e.g., "I *always* feel isolated from others") and so create a sense of low loneliness. Feedback ensued. Experimental participants were told that they were on the 62nd percentile of the loneliness score distribution, and thus were "above average on loneliness" compared to their peers. Control participants were told that they were on the 12th percentile, and thus were "very low on loneliness" compared to their peers. Subsequently, participants were instructed to explain why they were not lonely, or were lonely, depending on condition. Assessment of nostalgia followed. Participants completed a state version of the Nostalgia Inventory (Batcho, 1995), which measures level of nostalgia for 20 objects from one's past (e.g., "my family," "toys," "the way people were," "having someone to depend on"). Participants in the high loneliness condition reported feeling more nostalgic than those in the low loneliness condition. In all, when lonely, individuals seek refuge in nostalgia.

The second tenet of the Regulatory Model is that loneliness is linked to adverse outcomes. Abeyta et al. (2020) assessed loneliness with the 10-item UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996; e.g., "How often do you feel like people are around you but not with you?"). Further, they assessed two adverse outcomes. One was (lower) social confidence, using a 6-item scale (Abeyta, Routledge, Roylance, et al., 2015; e.g., "Rate your confidence in your ability to …," "establish successful social relationships," "… maintain social relationships"). The other adverse outcome was (lower) approach-oriented social goals or intentions, using both a 4-item friendship-approach goal scale (Elliot et al., 2006; "I feel that I want to move toward growth and development in my friendships") and a 3-item friendship conflict resolution task measuring intentions to resolve an imagined conflict with one's best friend (Abeyta, Routledge, Roylance, et al., 2015; e.g., "I would dedicate myself to solving this conflict"). Loneliness was related to lower social confidence and weaker intentions for conflict resolution.

The third and final tenet of the Regulatory Model states that nostalgia suppresses the link between loneliness and an adverse outcome. Again, Abeyta et al. (2020) provided

evidence consistent with this tenet. Nostalgia attenuated the relation between loneliness and either social confidence or intentions for conflict resolution. In other words, due to nostalgia, lonely participants were more likely to be socially confident or keen on resolving friendship conflict.

The Regulatory Model was also tested in two correlational online studies conducted in Western samples during the COVID-19 pandemic (Zhou et al., 2021). Loneliness was positively associated with nostalgia, but negatively associated with well-being (e.g., happiness). However, nostalgia was positively related to well-being, countervailing the detrimental influence of loneliness.

The buffer property of nostalgia in cross-cultural context

We next discuss the buffering role of nostalgia against loneliness (cross-culturally), and relevance of nostalgia in acculturation processes.

Loneliness. The Regulatory Model (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, Zhou, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022a, 2022b) has also been tested in Chinese samples. In a correlational study (Zhou et al., 2008), Chinese migrant children and teenagers (aged 9–15) completed measures of loneliness (UCLA Loneliness Scale; Russell, 1996), nostalgia (Southampton Nostalgia Scale; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routldge, Arndt, Hepper, Zhou, 2015), and social support (12-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support; Zimet et al., 1988; e.g., "I can count on my friends when things go wrong"). Loneliness was positively related to nostalgia. However, loneliness was also linked to lack of social support. Finally, nostalgia was positively associated with social support, thus counteracting the negative influence of loneliness.

Zhou et al. (2008) proceeded to test the Regulatory Model experimentally. They began by inducing loneliness among undergraduates in the same way as Wildschut et al. (2006) did. Then, they assessed level of nostalgia (with a state version of the Southampton Nostalgia Scale) and social support (with a state version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support). Lonely participants reported feeling nostalgic but also lacking in social support. Nostalgia, in turn, was linked to stronger social support, thus countering the negative impact of loneliness.

Lastly, the model has put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic, using an online sample (Zhou et al., 2021). The results replicated those in Western samples, reported above.

Loneliness was positively linked to nostalgia, but negatively linked to well-being. In turn, nostalgia was positively associated with well-being, countervailing the noxious influence of loneliness.

Acculturation. Immigrants (but also sojourners and international students) are faced with challenges both at the social structural level (e.g., immigration policy) and the social interaction level (e.g., attitudes, behaviors; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). They are largely perceived as a threat to host societies (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), with the threat being either symbolic (i.e., altering or diluting the national identity) or material (e.g., causing economic disadvantage; Esses et al., 2001). Consequently, immigrants encounter not only discriminatory polities (e.g., visa restrictions), but also everyday stereotyping and prejudice (Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan et al., 2005). The consequences, added to unfamiliarity with the host culture's norms or language, financial hardship, and lack of a social network, contribute to acculturative stress, that is, an immigrant's "response … to life events that are rooted in intercultural contact" (Berry, 2006, p. 43). Acculturative stress entails loneliness, alienation, depression, and anxiety.

Some theorists have proposed that acculturative stress conduces to nostalgia, which in turn counteracts its consequences (Nikelly, 2004; Sedikides et al., 2009). For example, Nikelly (2004, p. 185) speculated that reflecting on "pleasant times and places provides temporary solace and security and serves as a defense against the threat of alienation." There is suggestive evidence for the possibility that acculturative stress conduces to nostalgia. Such evidence has been obtained among Chinese immigrants to Canada (Walker et al., 2011), Latin American immigrants to Spain (Hernández et al., 2011), and international students in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2021). Future research would do well to examine more rigorously the Regulatory Model in this context. Having been evoked by acculturative stress, does nostalgia subsequently assuage the negative ramifications of stress, such as loneliness or alienation?

Further, immigrants negotiate two cultures, home and host. This process can culminate in one of four acculturation patterns: (1) *integration*—maintaining cultural identity and develop relationships with members of the host culture; (2) *assimilation*—developing relationships with host-culture members, but not maintaining cultural identity; (3) *separation*—maintaining cultural identity, but not developing relationships with host-culture members; and (4) *marginalization*—neither maintaining cultural identity nor developing relationships with host-culture members. Not only is integration immigrants' preferred acculturation pattern (Berry et al., 1989; Roccas et al., 2000), but it also optimizes their psychological health (Berry & Sam, 1997; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000).

Two studies have linked nostalgia to acculturation. One study (Zou et al., 2018) examined the role of host-culture nostalgia (i.e., USA) in a large sample of international

teachers from 41 countries. The teachers had recently returned to their home countries after a full-time salaried placement in US school districts. Zou et al. postulated that host-nostalgia culture links sojourners' experiences across different cultures and hence serves to maintain self-continuity. In turn, self-continuity mediates the positive association between host-culture nostalgia and psychological adjustment.

To assess host-culture nostalgia, Zou et al. (2018) provided participants with an abbreviated version of the *New Oxford Dictionary* definition of nostalgia ("sentimental longing for the past'") and asked them to report how nostalgic they felt for 10 objects in the host culture (e.g., "the friends I made there," "the natural scenery where I lived"). To assess home-culture nostalgia, as a control, Zou et al. provided again participants with the abovementioned definition of nostalgia and asked them to indicate how nostalgic they felt for 10 objects in their home culture before immigrating to the USA (e.g., "someone I loved," "my pets"). Afterward, the researchers assessed self-continuity by asking participants to rate the degree to which thinking nostalgically about their years in the USA made them feel "there is continuity in my life" and "connected with my past" (Sedikides et al., 2016). Finally, Zou et al. assessed three facets of psychological adjustment. The first was self-esteem, measured with five items from the Core Self-Evaluations Scale (e.g., "I complete tasks successfully"; Judge et al., 2003). The second was approach motivation, measured with two items ("I focus on opportunities that will enhance my life," "I am primarily motivated by seeking potential successes"; Cunningham et al., 2005). The third was job satisfaction, measured with the short form of the Job Satisfaction Scale (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951; e.g., "I find real enjoyment in my work"). A composite of these three measures indexed psychological adjustment.

Indeed, host-culture nostalgia conduced to greater self-continuity, controlling for home-culture nostalgia. In addition, host-culture nostalgia was positively related to psychological adjustment, also controlling for home-culture nostalgia. Finally, self-continuity mediated the positive relation between host-culture nostalgia and psychological adjustment. In summary, host-culture nostalgia predicted greater self-continuity and ensuing psychological adjustment.

Another study that linked nostalgia to acculturation was conducted by Petkanopoulou et al. (2021). They were concerned with how nostalgia influences the way that bicultural individuals acculturate or adapt to another culture. Acculturation orientation is defined as the balance between sustaining and valuing one's home culture or cultural heritage and appreciate or participating in one's host culture (Berry, 2005). Effective acculturation enables bicultural identity integration, defined as the extent to which people perceive their cultural identities as overlapping and harmonious or separate and conflictual (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

Petkanopoulou et al. (2021) proposed that host-culture nostalgia strengthens bicultural identity integration by amplifying acculturation orientation toward the host culture. They tested this proposition in a sample of Greek immigrants in various European countries (e.g., Belgium, Germany, United Kingdom). They induced nostalgia with the Event Reflection Task. Participants reflected upon and wrote about either a nostalgic event (nostalgia condition) or an ordinary event (control condition) in their host country. Subsequently, they completed the Brief Acculturation Orientation Scale (Demes & Geeraert, 2014; e.g., "It is important for me to take part in [host country] traditions"). Higher scores indicated a more favorable acculturation orientation toward the host culture. Lastly, participants completed the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale-Version 2 (Huynh, 2009), which consisted of cultural harmony items ("I find it easy to balance both Greek and [host] cultures") and cultural blendedness items (e.g., "I feel Greek and [host culture] at the same time") that were averaged to form a composite.

Nostalgia (relative to control) strengthened positive acculturation orientation toward the host culture. Also, nostalgia (relative to control) heightened bicultural identity integration. Further, positive acculturation orientation mediated the effect of host-culture nostalgia on bicultural identity integration. Taken together, nostalgia aided bicultural individuals to acculturate to their host culture.

Concluding remarks

We considered the triggers, functions, and buffer property of nostalgia both in Western cultures and cross-culturally. In terms of the character of nostalgia, prototype studies indicated that laypersons in many countries conceptualize nostalgia as a past-referent, self-relevant, social, and ambivalent—albeit primarily positive—emotion. Also, nostalgia is triggered in a similar manner, and is a relatively common experience, across cultures.

Furthermore, nostalgia serves similar functions—those of social connectedness, meaning in life, and self-continuity—across cultures. Future research would do well to test whether additional functions of nostalgia established in the West are equally potent in other cultures. These functions include optimism (Cheung et al., 2013), inspiration (Stephan et al., 2015), goal pursuit (Sedikides et al., 2018), and creativity (Van Tilburg et al., 2015). Future research would also need to find out whether nostalgia interventions carried out in the West (Layous et al., 2021) are equally effective in other cultures.

We note the null effect of a country-level variable, individualism/collectivism, that theoretically would moderate the functions of nostalgia. A reason for this null effect may be the rather narrow conceptual definition of the construct. According to Vignoles et al. (2016) self-construal is not captured adequately by the global dimension of

individualism versus collectivism. Instead, regardless of whether cultures are higher on individualism versus collectivism, they may differ on more specific dimensions such as self-direction versus receptiveness to influence, self-reliance versus dependence, and self-interest versus commitment to others. Future research on nostalgia would benefit by taking into account specific dimensions of individualism/collectivism.

The literature on nostalgia as a buffer against discomforting states (e.g., loneliness) was uneven, as the preponderance of studies has been conducted in the West. Yet, the extant cross-cultural evidence points to similarities rather than differences across cultures. Being the fundamental human experience that it is, nostalgia likely serves as a buffer or coping mechanism pan-culturally. Evidence that nostalgia facilitates acculturation in a variety of host culture settings is consistent with this assertion.

We ventured into a review of nostalgia in cross-cultural context. The literature so far has established empirical patterns that largely generalize across cultures. It is up to the next wave of research to showcase both cross-cultural generality and cultural specificity.

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

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Appendix A

The Event Reflection Task

Nostalgia condition. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "nostalgia" is defined as a "sentimental longing for the past." Please think of a nostalgic event in your life. Specifically, try to think of a past event that makes you feel most nostalgic. Bring this nostalgic experience to mind. Immerse yourself in the nostalgic experience. How does it make you feel? Please spend a couple of minutes thinking about how it makes you feel. Please write down four keywords relevant to this nostalgic event (i.e., words that describe the experience).

Using the space provided below, for the next few minutes, we would like you to write about the nostalgic event. Immerse yourself into this nostalgic experience. Describe the experience and how it makes you feel.

Control condition. Please bring to mind an ordinary event in your life. Specifically, try to think of a past event that is ordinary. Bring this ordinary experience to mind. Immerse yourself in the ordinary experience. How does it make you feel? Please spend a couple of minutes thinking about how it makes you feel. Please write down four keywords relevant to this ordinary event (i.e., words that describe the experience).

Using the space provided below, for the next few minutes, we would like you to write about the ordinary event. Immerse yourself into this experience. Describe the experience and how it makes you feel.

Manipulation check. The following statements refer to how you feel *right now*. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement by placing a number in the blank space preceding each statement. The number should be anywhere from 1 to 7, according to the following scale.

___ Right now, I am feeling quite nostalgic.
___ Right now, I am having nostalgic feelings
___ I feel nostalgic at the moment.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very much

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very much

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very much

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very much

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very rarely						Very frequently

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very rarely						Very frequently

Appendix B

Southampton Nostalgia Scale

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "nostalgia" is defined as a "sentimental longing for the past."

1. How valuable is nostalgia for you?
2. How important is it for you to bring to mind nostalgic experiences?
3. How significant is it for you to feel nostalgic?
4. How prone are you to feeling nostalgic?
5. How often do you experience nostalgia?
6. Generally speaking, how often do you bring to mind nostalgic experiences?
7. Specifically, how often do you bring to mind nostalgic experiences? (Please check one.)
   _____ Once or twice a year
   _____ Once every couple of months
   _____ Once or twice a month
   _____ Approximately once a week
   _____ Approximately twice a week
   _____ Three to four times a week
   _____ At least once a day